

# Town of West Hartford

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **America is my home, Reflections of a Refugee and Two Immigrants *Saturday, March 11, 2PM, Faxon Library***

WEST HARTFORD, CONN. (February 24, 2017) – West Hartford's second annual One Book, One Town initiative will spotlight three extraordinary people on Saturday, March 11, at its forum, "America is my home: Reflections of a Refugee and Two Immigrants."

The free event will be held from 2:00PM at the Faxon Branch Library, 1073 New Britain Avenue. All are welcome.

Come hear Lhakpa Sherpa, Marc-Yves Regis and Aiti Rai as they retell their powerful stories as immigrants and refugee who came to America to begin a new life.

Lhakpa Sherpa is a mountain climber. Lhakpa has climbed Mount Everest seven times, the most of any woman in the world. In 2000 she became the first Nepalese woman to climb and descend Everest successfully. Lhakpa grew up in Makalu, Nepal as one of 11 children. Lhakpa Sherpa will make her 8<sup>th</sup> climb to the peak of Mt. Everest on April 10, 2017. Sherpa lives in West Hartford with her two daughters.

Marc-Yves Regis is a photo journalist, poet, author of five books, and founder/director of Camp Hispaniola, Inc., a summer camp in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, serving 150 children each. The Haitian native is deeply committed to the country he was forced to flee as a teenager.

Regis worked as a photo journalist for the *Miami Herald*, *Los Angeles Times* and the *Hartford Courant* and is the author of five books: "Haiti Through My Eyes," a selection of poetry about Haiti; "Deadly Road to Democracy," a first-person account of Haiti's violent struggle for democracy; "Two Good Feet," a photographic documentary of physically-challenged Haitian

children, “Haiti After the Shock” a selection of poems and stories about the earthquake in Haiti, and “Headstrong: Children Carrying Haiti's Economic Burdens.”

Aiti Rai is a native of Nepal and a 2015 graduate of Hartford Public High School Law & Government Academy. Aiti currently attends Manchester Community College where she studies liberal arts and the sciences. She would like to continue her education and receive a Bachelor degree in political science. Her goal is to become a lawyer and help her community.

In the Spring of her senior year, she was inspired by a citizenship class offered by HPHS and Hartford Public Library, funded by a grant from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. Since that time, she worked to fulfill her dream of becoming a U.S. citizen. In 2016, that dream came true.

“I lived as refugee in my own country, Nepal, for 21 years. I did not have citizenship [anywhere]. I felt hopeless. I experienced discrimination. When you hear the word “home” you think of a place where you feel safe and comfortable, and where you share a common culture and identity. I had no such place to call home, no place where I shared traditions, food, a set of beliefs, and a common language,” said Rai.

The panel discussion will be moderated by Pramod Pradhan, West Hartford Library’s new community engagement librarian. Pradhan, a West Hartford resident, emigrated with his family from Nepal to Connecticut in 2004. Pradhan knows firsthand the value the library has in lives of families who are settling into a new country.

One Book, One Town brings the community together by reading a common book and discussing its core themes. This year’s book, *Of Beetles and Angels: A Boy’s Remarkable Journey from a Refugee Camp to Harvard* by Mawi Asgedom, resonates with the three speakers at the March 11 event.

*Of Beetles and Angels* is a true story of a young boy’s journey from civil war in east Africa to a refugee camp in Sudan, to a childhood on welfare in an affluent American suburb, and eventually to a full-tuition scholarship at Harvard University.

“The stories of Lhakpa, Marc-Yves and Aiti put faces on a national topic of the plight of refugees and immigrants seeking a better life in our country,” said Renée McCue, public relations specialist, Town of West Hartford. “This special event could not be timelier,” she said.

For more information, visit [www.WestHartfordCT.gov/1Book1Town](http://www.WestHartfordCT.gov/1Book1Town) or call 860-561-7521.

Special thanks to the event sponsors and organizers: Barnes & Noble Booksellers Blue Back Square, Town of West Hartford, West Hartford Library, West Hartford Public Schools, Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society, and the West Hartford Human Rights Commission.

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